



OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION TUITION ASSISTANCE POLICY EFFECTIVE SEPTEMBER 2011

Introduction

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation has established the following Tuition Assistance Policy consistent with the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) as outlined in the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998
All tuition assistance is based on availability of funds.

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Authority

The authority for the Educational Assistance program for employees of the Commonwealth of Kentucky is KRS 164.357, which created the Governmental Services Center and provided for its duties and responsibilities. Executive Order 2004-728 abolished the Governmental Services Center and established the Office of Government Training (OGT). OGT is responsible for issuing, administering, and interpreting this policy. (The OEOD Formal Name Change has not yet taken place.)

Sources of Funds

The OVR tuition policy is based on current state allowances as well as funding availability and is subject to change.

Payment of Funds and Educational Sources

Educational assistance provides for the payment of funds directly to the educational institution by the agency after the employee has received prior approval for the course from the agency's Appointing Authority or designee.

Employees Eligible for Tuition Assistance

Permanent full-time Office of Vocational Rehabilitation employees required to achieve educational standards mandated by Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) if funds are not available from university CSPD grants. Currently this includes vocational rehabilitation counselors, case managers, field administrators and positions that are considered "paraprofessionals" who are required to hold a degree leading to a specific certification in their field of expertise. All other personnel with a desire to become a vocational rehabilitation counselor may apply for agency tuition assistance when available after the mandated CSPD commitments have been met for the positions identified above.

Approved Degree Programs and Courses

Master of Rehabilitation Counseling programs only will be approved for tuition assistance. Category R certificate programs at designated universities for.

- Behavioral Health
- Behavioral Science
- Disability Studies
- Human Relations
- Human Services
- Marriage and Family Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Psychology
- Psychometrics
- Rehabilitation
- Social Work
- Special Education
- Vocational Assessment/Evaluation

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For additional information on Category R eligibility visit:
<http://www.crc certification.com/filebin/pdf/CATEGORY-R.pdf>

Note: Employees requiring or requesting a college level course not leading to a full degree may do so through the professional development policy though the forms required for tuition assistance will need to be completed (if course is approved) to authorize payment to the university or college.

Amount of Tuition Assistance and Allowable Courses Per Session

Tuition assistance is permitted at 100% tuition cost. (See page 4 and 5 for a complete list of "Allowable" and "Non-Allowable" expenditures.)

All employees **must** apply for any scholarships that are available and those will be applied prior to agency providing final payment. The agency does not calculate eligibility for loans into the request for tuition assistance.

Approved Colleges and Universities

The University of Kentucky is the only university in the state that offers the Master of Rehabilitation Counseling degree. Tuition assistance is available for the MRC program at the University of Kentucky and counselors qualifying for CSPD grants must utilize those grants in order to achieve their degree. The grant does not cover the cost of books or technology fees. The agency will pay the cost of the technology fees if funding is available, but book purchases are the responsibility of the individual.

For those counselors that already have a master's degree the Category R certificate program offered at several universities might be the answer for you. This will allow you to meet CSPD qualifications for the agency without having to get another master's degree. The HRD Program Administrator can conduct a transcript review to help determine your eligibility for this alternative path. As with the full MRC scholarship programs, employee's first need to utilize the universities offering the certificate through their CSPD grants. If grant funds are not available then tuition assistance funds can be utilized to achieve this.

**** Auburn University** - Employees (who are counselors, managers or any state VR employee with the intent to become a VR counselor) may participate in the Auburn MRC Program under the CSPD grant for the institution. Out-of-state travel is required for these programs and employees are responsible for submitting the necessary paperwork for approval to travel to the school campus. The paperwork must be submitted in the timeframe as required by the Education Cabinet and approval must be received prior to the travel date or the employee will not be covered under worker's compensation and must take annual leave in order to attend the session.

****Virginia Commonwealth University** - Qualified employees (counselors or field branch manager) may participate in the Auburn or Virginia Commonwealth University MRC Program under the CSPD grant for the institution. Out-of-state travel is required

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for these programs and employees are responsible for submitting the necessary paperwork for approval to travel to the school campus. The paperwork must be submitted in the timeframe as required by the Education Cabinet and approval must be received prior to the travel date or the employee will not be covered under worker's compensation and must take annual leave in order to attend the session.

**** San Diego State University/Northwest Texas University and Southern University in Louisiana** - Qualified employees (counselors or field branch manager) may participate in the San Diego State University/Northwest Texas University or Southern University MRC Program under the CSPD grant for these institutions. No Out-of-state travel is required for these programs since students are not required to attend on campus. However, as a part of their grant, Southern University does provide opportunities for the students to attend national conferences related to rehabilitation, but approval is dependent upon approval at the state level. Out-of-state travel is required to attend these conferences and employees are responsible for submitting the necessary paperwork for approval. The paperwork must be submitted in the timeframe as required by the Education Cabinet and approval must be received prior to the travel date or the employee will not be covered under worker's compensation and must take annual leave in order to attend the conference

Work Time Allowances/Work Schedule

Employees will continue to work on a full-time basis, but may use flexible work schedules and annual/compensatory leave to accommodate participation in the tuition assistance program provided it does not adversely impact services or employee job performance.

Class assignments that can be incorporated into required work duties (i.e. practicum activities, internship activities) may be completed during working hours.

Compensatory Time

Compensatory time will not be approved for course work or course hours.

Educational Leave Policy

Special leave of absence may be granted, with or without pay, for up to 24 months, with the approval of the appointing authority and the Secretary of Personnel. If the leave is granted, it shall be either with pay (if the employee contractually agrees to a service commitment) or without pay.

A special leave of absence may be used to attend college, university, or business school, or to receive training in work-related subjects when it is of tangible benefit to the state. Employees will not accumulate annual/compensatory leave or sick leave while on special leave with pay. If leave is without pay, employees must make arrangements through the payroll officer to continue health and life insurance. Employees must pay the total premiums.

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Allowable Expenditures

- Educational Institution Application and/or Registration Fee – One time only and must be paid through invoice process. The procard should be used for this expenditure.
- Tuition
- Fees
- Graduate Records Exam (GRE) (see below)
 - Available to employees who meet tuition assistance eligibility

Non-Allowable Expenditures

- Late registration
- Materials or course supplies
- Books
- Withdrawal fees or non-recoverable tuition based on employee dropping course – reimbursement to the agency is required
- Parking or transportation
- Records or transcripts
- Remedial Courses
- Specific courses taken previously by the employee without prior approval for tuition assistance.
- Courses being repeated

GRE

The agency will pay for an employee to take for the GRE (one time only) if they meet the necessary requirements for tuition assistance eligibility. The cost of the GRE must be paid by procard with appropriate documentation to substantiate the purchase (receipt). The Office recognizes that the administration of examinations may take place during the week or on the weekend and expects that employees will use flex schedules and/or leave time to accommodate the testing requirements. Travel expense is not provided.

Expectations

Expectations for maintaining satisfactory job performance and meeting job expectations such as positive employment outcomes (PEO) take precedence. If a supervisor notes a decrease in job performance and coaching mechanisms do not adequately address the issue, it may be necessary for the employee to withdraw from the program or reduce the course load until job performance has improved.

Timelines for Meeting CSPD

Employees required to meet CSPD standards such as those carrying a caseload and field branch managers are expected to achieve the standard of "Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor" which Kentucky has defined as educationally qualified to sit for the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor designation. The required degree is to be achieved within five (5) years from the date of employment.

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Use of State Equipment

Employees are expected to access available equipment outside of the Office in order to pursue educational goals.

Employee Obligation

All employees receiving assistance under these guidelines are subject to a two (2) year work commitment to the Office upon completion of the degree.

The signed Tuition Assistance Form indicates authorization for the Office to withhold future educational assistance monies or to recover all or part of any assistance granted if:

- The employee's tuition assistance form contains any material falsification; or,
- The employee fails to provide the Office, within thirty (30) working days of scheduled completion of the course, a student evaluation for each course taken and an official grade report with a satisfactory grade in the course for which the educational assistance was authorized. An employee must earn a grade of "B" or better in graduate studies to be considered satisfactory. A grade of "I" or "S" will result in the withholding of funds until the class is satisfactorily completed unless the HRD Administrator determines that the incomplete resulted from circumstances beyond the employee's control. Failing a course will result in the withholding of tuition assistance and other expenditures until the employee has paid for and satisfactorily completed an equal number of course hours; or,
- The employee is voluntarily terminated or dismissed after a course is completed or during a course and before the employee's two (2) year employment requirement is met. This policy shall not apply to employees who do not meet the service requirements because of layoffs, reductions in work force, or actions resulting from internal mobility programs; or,
- The employee drops the course; or,
- The employee receives duplicate payment for the same course from any other sources, i.e. scholarships, veteran's educational payments, etc

Obligation of the Supervisor

It is the supervisor's responsibility to review the Office's career development policy with the employee and assist in the development of the personal career development plan. Additionally, supervisors are responsible for assuring that the following criteria are met prior to approval for employees to enter or continue in training required to meet CSPD requirements:

- The employee must be satisfactorily completing all job duties;

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- The employee must have a current Personal Career Development Plan with specific career development goals that have been reviewed and approved by the employee's supervisor.

The supervisor's signature on the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Tuition Assistance Form verifies that the employee's obligations have been met and that the supervisor fully supports the employee's participation in the training.

Equal Opportunity

Selection for participation in training shall be on an equal opportunity basis. No employee shall be prohibited from participating in training courses because of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, age, or veteran status.

Exception Policy

Degree program exceptions will not be provided.

Course-by-course exceptions for more than 5 hours per semester will require strong justification by the employee and employee's supervisor. The justification shall include benefits and/or consequences if the exception is not granted. The justification for the request and a completed tuition assistance form outlining the courses requested must be made in writing at least 30 days prior to the beginning of the semester for which the request is being submitted. The forms must be submitted to the assistant director of record for approval and if approved forwarded to the division director. The Division Director along with the Executive Director will review the request and current budget constraints to make a determination regarding the request. The HRD Program Administrator will provide input as needed in the decision making process and will notify the employee and supervisor in writing regarding the decision.

Required Forms

Forms are available on the Intranet.

- OVR Tuition Assistance Form (all employees seeking tuition assistance must file this form at least 30 days prior to the beginning of courses)
- Course Evaluation Form (required for all employees and should be filed at the end of each course along with a copy of the final grade report)

Procedures for Application and Approval

1. Complete the Office Tuition Assistance Form including supervisor and 2nd line supervisor approval and submit to the Assistant Director of record. The Assistant Director will sign and return to the HRD Program Administrator for processing with the college or university.
2. Upon approval the applicant will receive a copy of the signed Tuition Assistance Form and shall complete the appropriate application processes for the identified college or university.

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3. The Office will provide the educational institution with a copy of the Tuition Assistance Form as authorization for payment of tuition fees.

It is imperative that the Tuition Assistance Form be completed and received by the HRD Program Administrator no later than one month prior to the beginning of classes.